

**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities FY 13 Budget Priorities  
Before the Montgomery County Council  
April 12, 2012**

Patricia Gallalee, Chair | Charles Crawford, Vice-Chair

My name is Patricia Gallalee, and I am Chairperson of the Commission on People with Disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to share our priorities with you. The Commission's primary work has been in the areas of accessible housing, increasing employment opportunities and a safe, reliable transportation system. We request that the Council provide policy direction or funding for the following:

**Accessible Housing:** The Commission recommends to you and the County Council and its Housing Policy Committee to develop ways to produce a substantial number of homes with basic accessibility. The County needs homes that are both affordable and accessible.

We see that the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) is investing \$1.5 M from the Housing Initiative Fund in addition to previously appropriated funds for affordable housing to develop a senior independent living facility adjoining the new Silver Spring Library. Using public money and including requirements for modifying homes to make them accessible also needs to be addressed. The Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) administers the Single Family Home Improvement Loan Program, but available funds or grants are limited to people with very low incomes.

The Housing Initiative Fund (HIF), also administered by DHCA, promotes a broad range of housing opportunities in the County to alleviate difficulties experienced by many low and moderate income households in obtaining and maintaining housing at affordable costs. HIF funding can, and has been used to: fund new construction; preserve existing homes; support new rental construction; finance the substantial rehabilitation of rental housing; support the preservation or development of senior, family, or special needs housing by nonprofit or for profit sponsors; and support the preservation or development of single-family, town house and apartment buildings.

We would ask you to consider requiring that any new housing using HIF funds meet the basic accessibility features of the County's Design for Life Montgomery program. This would mean a no-step entry; 32" interior doors; 36" exterior entries; and hallways and a useable powder room. We recommend that the County adopt basic accessibility design standards in any home it builds, renovates or regulates such as Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDU's) and Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) housing. We also recommend that HOC do an inventory of accessible housing and develop a tool to match available accessible units with people who need them.

The Design for Life Montgomery Workgroup has been meeting with builders from the Maryland National Capital Building Industry Association and discussing the option of an incentive program for builders who construct accessible homes or developments. Incentives could include reduced permitting fees and/or tax credits. The State of Virginia now offers a \$5,000 tax credit to entice builders to outfit homes with features that make housing more accessible. It was suggested that tax credits be offered to the buyer as well.

**Employment:** There is a high unemployment rate of people with disabilities. We request support for a County Special Hiring authority to establish a program to aid in hiring qualified disabled veterans and people with disabilities and thus, make an exception to the merit system. The Commission made a presentation to the Charter Commission on January 11, 2012 and they are currently considering this issue to be placed on the November ballot. We also recommend that the County reinstitute AP1-10 supported employment contracts that go to non-profits that employ people with disabilities to do work for the county. We thank you for the hiring preference for veterans and persons with disabilities that was passed by the Council and became effective in May, 2010. Since then, 10 veterans, 5 people with disabilities and one veteran with a disability have been hired. We are pleased to learn that 2 of the persons were interns in the Customized Employment program.

**Transportation:** While we applaud the reduction of fees for the second Call n Ride coupon book, it is essential that MetroAccess be fully maintained and improved. The State has the contract for Metro Access but we believe the County must take some responsibility to ensure that safe and satisfactory service be provided to those residents of Montgomery County who are so dependent on this service. Personally, I am very concerned  
(over)

about the safety of persons using Metro Access given some of the incidents with the drivers. There is a strong connection between the availability of a reliable transportation system to the ability of persons with disabilities being able to get to and from work so their dependency on other financial assistance is diminished. We are pleased that this budget makes needed strategic investments by increasing resources for Police by providing additional patrol officers and investigative positions to target crime "hot spots" in each district. We are hopeful that these additional patrol officers will be of help in combating the illegal use of disability parking placards and strengthen the County Executive's "Respect the Space" Disability Parking Campaign.

In addition, we recommend the following:

- Given that the County will be given additional funding through the Developmental Disabilities Administration, we support InterACC- DD's request for additional supplemental funding for expansion. However, we know that the needs of the community continue to grow and that this money will only go so far.
- We are pleased to see the restoration of the Home Care Chore Services Program targeted to low income frail elderly and people with disabilities who need help with light cleaning, vacuuming, laundry, and/or meal preparation in order to remain in their own homes and in the community. This funding will purchase service for approximately 21 clients with two hours of Chore Services per week for a year. (\$50,000).
- We are pleased that this budget also restores operating hours for libraries and increases the budget for reading materials – both print and electronic. Libraries are a vital resource to residents who have disabilities, particularly in terms of employment readiness and employment opportunities. Libraries not only provide job skills and literacy training, but also offer employment and volunteer opportunities (work experience) for people with disabilities.

We again thank you for this opportunity to partner with you as you consider your budgetary planning for the coming fiscal year.